Becoming an Ecological Citizen: The Concept of an Ecological Citizen in the movie *Avatar*

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ABSTRACT

Avatar intricately intertwines ecological resistance and citizenship themes on Pandora, presenting a rich avenue for ecological scholarship. Despite its cinematic prowess, there is a research gap in understanding the film's impact on ecological consciousness. This paper aims to explore *Avatar* within the context of environmental cinema, analyzing its portrayal of ecological themes. Recent trends in film studies demonstrate a growing interest in such intersections, making *Avatar* a pertinent subject for investigation. Experts like Levinas, Dobson, and Rousseau are selected for their profound insights into ethics, environmental citizenship, and the human-nature relationship, offering relevant, authoritative, and influential perspectives that align with the research goals. By examining existing literature on the urgency of ecological awareness and critical reviews, the paper aims to uncover the film's influence on ecological attitudes. The implications extend to environmental advocacy and education, emphasizing the potential of popular media, like *Avatar*, to shape attitudes toward sustainable coexistence and ecological citizenship. Integrating *Avatar* into educational curricula has the potential to enhance environmental literacy among students, fostering a deeper understanding of ecological issues and inspiring proactive engagement. By leveraging the film's themes of interconnectedness and ecological stewardship, educators can instill values of environmental responsibility and citizenship in future generations.

Keywords: ecological citizenship, environment, *Avatar*, participation, responsibility

Introduction

Avatar, a James Cameron blockbuster movie that was produced in 2009, portrays the concept of ecological citizenship through the protagonist's transformation from a human soldier to a defender of Pandora's environment and indigenous inhabitants. Cameron's film aligns with what Wicaksono, Y. T., Ginting, D., & Sunardi, F. D. (2023) claim that "the theme of environmental issues is often raised [in media] as a form of criticism of human behavior that damages the environment and an effort to invite humans to care more about environmental problems and act to overcome them" (p 292). In the movie, humans travel to other planets in the universe to find the resources they need. Humans find Pandora, a biologically diverse planet

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with a complex environment. The indigenous inhabitants of Pandora (the Na'vi) fight the humans in defense of their home planet. Brereton (2022) argues that Na'vi "literally plug into the exotic, ecologically benign, and idyllic flora and fauna, rather than just naturally appearing at one with their habitat" (p. 337). The environmental theme of *Avatar* encourages peace and balance between people and the natural world. The film has essentialized Indigenous people to serve as a representation to maintain the equilibrium.

The movie opens in 2154, with the depletion of Earth's natural resources. Jak Sully, the protagonist and former marine who has lost his legs, goes to Pandora, an Earth-like habitable extrasolar moon 4.4 light years away. Humans, with the support of the 'Resources Development Administration and some military force, have controlled it for thirty years and are mining rare minerals required for energy generation on the surface of the Earth. With selfish intentions, the Administration strives to forge a close relationship with the dwellers of Pandora—tall blue warriors "Na'vi" so as to enslave them and exploit their resources. As Pandora's atmosphere is toxic to humans, a team of scientists creates 'avatars,' genetically engineered Na'vi—human hybrids driven by human neurological systems. Then, Jake is called up to drive one "made with the DNA of his dead twin brother so that he can gather intelligence to use against the Na'vi" (Avatar: Reaching the Height, 2010, p. 6). On the contrary, he is captivated by Pandora's environment and supported by Neytiri, a Na'vi princess; he succeeds in navigating the moon's landscapes and changes his views on them. As a result, he starts to respect its creatures and understands its spiritual power. Ultimately, he transforms himself into Na'vi and leads Pandora's defense against humans that encroach on their habitat and resources for their gain.

The Na'vi are therefore portrayed and characterized as being closer to nature in their function as the "ecological citizens" as a counter-narrative to Earth's technology-dependent, resource-intensive culture. Here, some of the humans play a very vital role in saving the ecological narrative of the indigenous people (The Na'vi) and helping them fight against their own race (the human race). The movie employs an ecological voice to further its environmental as well as ecological message by utilizing antiquated representations of Indigenous people. The film's usage of images of Indigenous people and how these images affect and further the film's environmental message, moving towards the notion of "ecological citizenship," are graphically analyzed in this article.

Indeed, "citizenship" has been a burning issue of debate within the green literature since the 1990s (Melo-Escrihuela, 2015, p. 113). Concepts like ecological and environmental citizenship are often linked with green politics and theories of citizenship. "Despite the widespread use of these terms, the relationship between green political thought and citizenship remains under-explored, and the concepts of ecological and environmental citizenship under-theorized" (Melo-Escrihuela, 2015, p.114). The meaning of the term "ecological citizenship" is not uniform, for it is still a novel concept. Nevertheless, we can find countless suggestions with respect to different ways that citizenship and the environment might be related. The most common definition of environmental citizenship is limited to the state territory and is practiced exclusively in the public domain. However, "ecological citizenship is a virtue-based account of citizenship" (p. 120) characterized by non-contractual and non-reciprocal duties in terms of injustice triggered by the socio-environmental impact of one's acts.

Revkin (2012) argues that "ecological thinking" views citizens and citizenship within co-defining relationships from the start, and by doing so, it incorporates ecological impact into the picture it draws: as an element in a system, a citizen is both impacted by and has an impact on this system. Thinking about citizenship through an ecological lens makes it impossible to ignore our ecological impact. But it is the inducement of ethical thinking—the one that repeatedly asks

us the question of responsibility—to open our eyes to coax us to the impact we have as such citizens. Both active and passive ecological citizenship can make an impact on nature. Since no citizens can live without a community, citizens should be aware and responsible for everyone's well-being. In Revkin's (2012) words, "[e]cological citizenship is the framework in which we can see both the need for individual responsibility and the absurdity in laying the onus of responsibility on the individual, both the ecology that sustains communities and the sustainability demanded from communities in order to maintain a balanced ecology." A perfect harmony between ecology and sustainability is required to give continuity to the existence of ecological citizenship.

Furthermore, ecological citizenship is a "post-cosmopolitan citizenship" (Dobson, 2013, p. 83) that creates a concept of 'beyond the state' idea. The question may arise: Can citizenship go beyond the state? The main idea of citizenship is participation in the public sphere. And there is no defined rule that the public sphere should be confined within the state. The public sphere can move into a different perspective, which can be based upon "moral responsibility and participation" (p. 86). The public sphere is not always legally bound and confined within a distinct periphery. Having discussed different voices about ecological citizenship, we can define ecological citizenship as the ethical responsibility and active participation of individuals in maintaining and enhancing the health and balance of the natural environment beyond national borders and legal constraints, emphasizing virtues such as sustainability and collective well-being.

Adhering to the essence of different definitions of ecological citizenship, in the movie *Avatar*, the protagonist character demonstrates immense responsibility and as well as participates in saving the aboriginal clan (Na'vi clan) from the intervention of humans who try to colonize their land, Pandora. Having both ecological and environmental consciousness, the protagonist, Jake Sully, moves out from his private sphere and acts in the sphere of public. Through a combination of qualitative studies and case studies, we argue that *Avatar* deals with ecological concerns (not only talks about environmental issues but also responsibilities) and tries to bring forth the concept of ecological citizenship by showing concern towards minorities.

Literature Review

Avatar has garnered significant attention, with numerous critical overviews exploring its themes. Much of the scholarly discourse surrounding *Avatar* examines ecological and environmental concepts, but grounding this analysis in key theoretical concepts of ecological citizenship is essential for a robust understanding. One theoretical framework that underpins discussions of ecological citizenship is the idea of environmental stewardship, emphasizing individuals' responsibilities towards the environment and the interconnectedness between human societies and the natural world. This perspective extends beyond environmentalism to encompass broader notions of citizenship, participation, and ethics in relation to ecological concerns. Moreover, the concept of environmental justice is crucial, addressing the unequal distribution of environmental benefits and burdens, highlighting the disproportionate impact of environmental degradation on marginalized communities, and emphasizing the need for inclusive decision-making processes and equitable distribution of resources. Additionally, theories of deep ecology and ecofeminism provide valuable insights into the interconnectedness of social and ecological systems. Deep ecology advocates for a radical shift in human consciousness towards recognizing the intrinsic value of all living beings and ecosystems, challenging anthropocentric worldviews. Ecoromance explores the intersection of love,

ecology, and connection with the environment. By incorporating these theoretical concepts into the analysis of *Avatar*, we can deepen our understanding of its environmental themes and critically examine its portrayal of Indigenous peoples, navigating issues of environmentalism, representation, and indigenous rights within the framework of ecological citizenship.

The research papers that mainly focus on this topic generally revolve around the concepts of environment and ecology. Here, the ecological and environmental discourse focuses on the environment itself, mainly nature. For example, a paper written by Justin Fritz mainly focuses on environmentalism and native peoples. This paper mainly visualizes how this film uses a stereotypical representation of the local Indigenous people, which delivers the environmental message implicitly or explicitly being spoken in the movie. In addition to that, this paper argues that the movie "by using archaic portrayals of Indigenous peoples, the film uses an Indigenous voice to propel its environmental message" (Fritz, 1969, p. 68).

In another article written by Robert Baird, he brings in the philosophical ideology of Jean Jacque Rousseau and contends that this movie not only treats the ecological Indian concept superficially or in a narrative convention but goes beyond it and challenges to place the people in nature, which is eternal. William Brown reflects upon the significance of the film in a more general way, ranging from environmental issues to political agendas and ideologies. He states that the movie *Avatar* should not be viewed only from its technological as well as financial successes; rather, it should be pushed to understand the myriad of problems that are prevalent in this world today.

The articles range from various theoretical lenses, so the next article, which was written by Yeong Ji Huang and Taig Youn Cho (2021), bases its study on psychological analysis. Their paper mainly attempts to verify a couple of hypotheses. First, scenes in which the audience experiences good feelings will reveal the Earth's natural landscape. Second, viewers will experience good feelings even if Pandora's landscape exaggerates natural patterns. So, to find out their claims, they chose 215 subjects and asked them how the scenes of *Avatar* impressed them or what kind of emotion they evoked in them.

Some of the articles talk about literary utopias as well as dystopias that reflect a wide variety of issues, ranging from class, gender, and environmental issues. The article written by Cenk Tan titled "Between Green Paradise and Bleak Calamity" focuses on the theme of environment, mainly concerning postcolonial ecocriticism that exposes the "relationship between colonialism and ecocriticism" (Tan, 2020, p. 301). The movie *Avatar* depicts, according to Tan, the notion of irrevocable destruction of the environment, which was the result of colonialism, and finally delivers a message of an ecocentric mentality that will result in a peaceful, humane, and sustainable future.

Similarly, Bergthaller illustrates how industrialization exploits natural resources. He sees the Na'avi's love for their ancestral land and their fight as resistance to corporate exploitation from outsiders. Admiring the film, he says *Avatar:*

> Places the question of environmental protection squarely within the context of environmental justice and indigenous rights while defining the latter in terms of ecocentric identification. The preservation of Pandora's ecology is inextricably linked with the Na'avi's struggle to hold on to their ancestral land and protect it from commercial exploitation by a transnational (or, more precisely, trans-planetary) corporation. (Bergthaller, 2012, p. 155)

Marry Anne Potter depicts the conflicting nature of the director himself. In his earlier films, James Cameron essentialized that the feminine is more connected towards nature, whereas, the

masculine is with technology. In her article Potter even criticizes the director for serving the masculine agenda, where the masculine protagonist is the ultimate savior and feminine supports the masculine agenda. This is further substantiated by the dialogue below.

> Jake: Hey! Hey! Stop! Stop.
>
> Operator: I got one of the natives blocking my blade here.
>
> Supervisor (to Selfridge): What do we do? He'll move. These people have to learn that we don't stop. (as cited in C.N., p. 2018)

Neyitri's concern for her ecology brings Jake (a male protagonist) to the frame point. She feels helpless when she eye-witnesses bulldozers crushing their sacred forest. Being a Pandora native, it becomes impossible for her to resist the technological exploitation of nature in such a horrified state. This exactly reflects Chongbang's (2022) claim that most Limbu native rituals have come under attack by modern or Western cultural practices such as technology or industrialization. Native roots are being replaced indiscriminately. The order and behavior of Selfridge are similar to a colonial who is interested in maximizing more profit at the cost of hurting nativist feelings.

Even though this article criticizes this agenda, it debates the concept between essentialist and posthumanist views. She claims that Cameron offers the essence of humanity through the relationship between nature and technology "alongside antonymous absolutes" (Potter, 2019). A paper written by Joni Adamson discusses the emergence of Indigenous cosmopolitics. So, Adamson reveals the plot as well as the connection it has with the concept of cosmopolitics. Cosmopolitics is the nature of universal consciousness, interests, and politics. It is the political cosmos of both humans and non-humans. Henceforth, this article reveals the plot where "Eywa" is controlling the entire ecosystem "described as a network of energy" (Adamson, 2012, p. 143). So, with the cinematic effect of the luminous setting, this article also reveals the connection of all these living entities with one another. In addition to this, Marsha S. Collings's essay "examines *Avatar*'s echoing of longstanding romance conventions while creating ecocentric romance or eco romance" (p. 103). This article also delves into the insight of the ecological ideology, connects it with romance, and reveals how romance remains an "enduring and popular fictional form" (p. 103).

The movie incorporates a number of religious concepts, argues Florain Jeserich. The name itself has been derived from the Hindu context that creates a theosophical preface. Jake Sully neurologically merges with his *Avatar*, and descends to the moon Pandora in this form. Jeserich argues that there are several overt and covert allusions to religious ideologies. The narrative structure revolves around religious subjects; however, it also opposes the established religion.

Silvia Martinez Falquina argues that James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009) has received contentious reactions, and it has been used to forward a number of political and ideological objectives. According to the perspective of trauma studies, the movie's portrayal of the underlying dread of human separation from nature, which is a component of the wounded state of our contemporary civilization, may hold the key to its impact. Based on the repetition of stereotypes and the rebuilding of ecotopia, this essay begins a study of how trauma is shown in the film and how it is dealt with. Falquini further adds that the movie concludes by problematizing the unthinking use of the trauma paradigm.

The essay written by Vijayasekaran, P., and G. Alan analyzes how humans in the film *Avatar* exploited scientific advances to their advantage in order to conquer the planet Pandora, kill its natives, and steal the priceless natural material unobtanium. This research paper reveals that nature is the basis for everything, but humans are destroying it with the help of scientific

breakthroughs, which is arguably like making our own lives miserable. This movie is an indirect depiction of science vs nature. This study paper further analyzes whether or not humans actually need science for a happy existence, given that the native inhabitants of Pandora were content with their way of life even before science invaded their planet.

Erb (2014) comes up with the distinctive idea of "deep ecology." "The Norwegian philosopher who coined the term 'deep ecology', Arne Naess, once remarked that there are many ways that people can take in order to arrive at the realization that all species have value, even if humanity cannot discern a 'use' for them. This leads me to wonder about many other things that might have played a role in my own path to ecocentrism" (Brown, 2012, p. 9). The ecological project constructed around *Avatar* comprised both mainstream and "deep" ecological themes and practices. "Deep ecology is known for creating a metaphorical distinction between shallow practices—such as recycling and composting—and the deep, probing questioning a person needs to engage to take shape as an ecological self. Deep ecology's rejection of anthropocentric, resource-based approaches to nature leads to an absolute embrace of a biosphere regarded as rich and diverse. This embrace jeopardizes conventional notions of self; emphasis is placed on self-realization born from intense experiences in nature. *Avatar's* themes correlate with many of the ideas from deep ecology. The film's textual system may thus be "deeper" than promotional efforts such as planting trees" (p. 7). The underlying message of the movie *Avatar* is not only the protection or conservation of nature that humans have been advocating for but also the need for a new type of membership—ecological citizenship.

Given all these research papers, most of them focus on cosmopolitics, human-technology relationships, human-nature relationships, ecocriticism, and a critical stance toward the colonial mindset of humans. All these articles have their own system of theoretical analysis, whereas this article develops its thesis through an "ecological citizenship" lens, a theoretical concept that tries to amalgamate the Private and the Public. Henceforth, this paper tries to fill the gap that has not been discussed in the earlier papers, revealing a theoretical background of ecological citizenship. None of the papers that we read for this research actually discussed the citizenship concept from an ecological viewpoint. So, we wanted to put forth our points of view on how *Avatar* discloses and imparts the knowledge of universal citizenship with its impression on ecology.

Avatar: An incarnation and its connection to the citizenship

Avatar is a Sanskrit word. It basically means to descend (Avatar), which alludes to the incarnation of a superbeing in a different form. *Avatar* is a form or a characteristic that is connected to the manifestation of a divine soul. The term "avatar" truly refers to "Divine Descent" which is also mentioned in Brahmavaivarta Purana. This particular word also connects to the transformation of a being into another being. So, in this movie, Jake Sully, the human character, has been transformed into one of the characters of the Na'vi people. He not only transfers or has been changed into another form, but he has actually accepted his transformation and has acted to be like them. His structure has been changed but he is basically the same character.

This change can become one of the important aspects of a character who changes for the betterment of the other. When the concept of the betterment of the other evolves, the concept of ecological citizenship arises. The forest is a neural network to people (Na'vi tribe), and the entire ecosystem being connected to each other creates a discourse that each environmental being helps each other one way or the other. Here not only Jake Sully but Grace and other couples of characters transform themselves to help the clan and also go against their own race.

Analyzing Ecological Citizenship with the Thematic Representation of Avatar

The Blockbuster movie that history seems to have forgotten is the Hollywood sci-fi movie *Avatar*, which was released worldwide in 2009. *Avatar* thematically discusses the apocalyptic situation on Earth and the environmental destruction resulting from colonialism. The well-known director James Cameron, on the backdrop of post-climate change Earth scenario, asserts the emerging futurist planetary wars between Earthlings and Pandorians for the sake of energy sources. James Cameron, in his interview to The Telegraph, tells: " ... the West can learn from Indigenous peoples is how to live an environmentally conscious life: 'a life that's in balance with the natural cycles of life on Earth'" (as cited in C.N., 2018, p. 40). His message is the ideas of conservation, preservation, and ecology from above. For him, although the Na'vi and Indigenous peoples are of nature, they serve as a bridge between "man" and "nature." “So, while they must be controlled by Sully during the Navi-Earthling war near the end of the film, the Na'vi fight for both themselves and Pandoran life. Indigenous peoples are thus valuable, for Cameron, in the sense that they have something to teach the West—they allow the West to preserve "their" way of life in the face of environmental degradation” (Fritz, 1969, p. 80). The West must now realize that no groups or inhabitants are going to surrender their ancestral property to them easily. They should give up their colonialist ideology not to let any war break out. *Avatar* can be described as mankind's eye-opener.

“The strong prey on the weak” a voiceover narrated by Jake Sully in the movie *Avatar* can be seen as the thematic minority essence of the movie. This particular dialogue seeps into the notion of the presence of humans in a territory. If someone is weak, the stronger one tries to displace the weaker one and shows their power. In the name of showing the power, the sphere they share moves into the power packet of the stronger. Just to break that share and disseminate equally among people, as discussed by Hannah Arendt, then only an actual practice of the public sphere can be seen. During this practice of the public sphere, a space of dissensus appears, and the concept of ecological citizenship comes into practice.

Ecological citizenship, as initially defined by Robert Dobson, is post-cosmopolitan citizenship. This concept is an offshoot of environmental citizenship and its notion related to it. Dobson further adds, "environmental rights have been canvassed as an addition to the standard triumvirate of civil, political, and social rights" (Dobson, 2003, p. 84). There is a debate and it is commonly argued that “environmental rights are a type of social right rather than something completely different” (p. 84). Environmental rights need to be perceived as a special category right that acts for the well-being of all the residents of the universe—living and non—living things.

The concern is that citizenship in ecological footprints has its closeness towards its sibling cosmopolitan citizenship, which was initially propounded by Zeno. But ecological citizenship is post-cosmopolitan citizenship because it is “global awareness associated with ecological thinking” (Scoville, 2016, p. 84). “The interconnectivity of individuals’ relations to the shared material basis of political life raises the question of how one is to define and circumscribe matters of concern for ecological citizens. Ecological citizenship, he argues, ‘refers to the source rather than the nature of the responsibility to determine what counts as citizenship virtues’” (p. 3).

Barry's concept of ecological citizenship transcends both the public and private sectors since it is based on a moral idea of "stewardship" that each person should embrace. Barry defines green citizens as engaged political actors who have an ethical need to protect the environment. He views green citizenship as fundamentally a kind of “ecological stewardship” (MacGregor, 2006, p. 90). They approach the environment with respect and an "ethic of usage," not by acting

in their own self-interest or by seeing ecological and human interests as intertwined. The stewardship philosophy, which has its foundation in small-scale family farming that the care for the environment cannot be independent of human interests. The ideal social-environmental connection is one in which human needs are addressed over the long term through sustainable consumption and production without the unjustified exploitation of land and animals, much like in excellent farming. Green citizens, in their capacity as ecological stewards, are able to balance and occasionally sacrifice their own specific interests with the common and environmentally sustainable good because they are aware of their dependency on nature.

Now, to dovetail into the culminating ideology of ecological citizenship is the individual claiming to sacrifice himself or herself for the benefit of the environment. Here as mentioned already, the environment is the combination of everything that also includes political as well as social connectedness and rights. So, ecological citizens have the willingness to act upon something that is unbalanced. People argue that the birth of the concept of ecological concerns and citizenship is due to the problem of liberal democracy. Liberal democracy's main problem is its "short-sightedness and profit-driven regime of production" (as cited in Jagers, 2009, p. 19). So, there is a need to shift from the ideologies of liberal democracy into more democratic concerns. The shift from all the democratic ideologies is taking place because all the challenges that have been evoked are developed due to the geographical and political boundaries. Therefore, without the concept of creating a global human, no individual state can succeed in abolishing all these environmental as well as ecological problems.

Three crucial characteristics set ecological citizenship different from other traditional citizenship. First of all, ecological citizenship is not just a public issue. Dobson's ecological citizenship integrates the private sphere into the political sphere (public sphere). This is a result of the realization that various sorts of private environmental behavior can have negative effects on the public. Like all citizenship, ecological citizenship is also based on duty, compassion, and social justice. Most importantly, it is encapsulated in the premise that says: "When I live my life I affect others, and to these others, I have obligations (regardless of whether or not I know them)" (Jagers, 2009, p. 20). In an interview, director James emphasizes the necessity of protecting ecology by offering resistance against environmental destruction:

> *Avatar* indirectly discusses the struggle for survival and sustainability that makes human beings to depend on other energy sources for their living. But, in this process, they deliberately forget the ethics of reconsidering nativist feelings and the existence of ecology. The necessity of protecting ecology along with the theological cultural pattern of natives made the sci-fi movie *Avatar* a serious subject for scrutiny. (C.N., 2018, p. 40)
>
> The movie is claimed to have brought these urgent issues to the notice of the concerned.

There is a need for a connection between theories and sociological aspects. Nguyen and Truong (2021) claim that four factors- actors, relationships, environments, structures, and processes- are interconnected when it comes to ecological construction and reconstruction, such as teacher identity. In a same vein, Scoville (2016) adds "Ecological citizenship theorists seek to respond to this concern by conceptualizing the role of a political agent caught up and constituted by webs of ecological interconnectivity" (p. 11). He further puts it "I suggest that the challenge facing ecological citizenship scholars is to bridge the gap between environmental political theory and empirical sociology on matters pertaining to environmental politics" (p. 14).

The analysis of *Avatar* and scholarly perspectives has suggested the urgency of collective global action in addressing environmental issues. It highlights the wisdom of indigenous peoples and advocates for integrating environmental concerns into public and private spheres through ecological citizenship. This approach calls for transcending profit-driven ideologies and embracing democratic and environmentally conscious systems. Bridging theoretical frameworks with sociological insights is essential for understanding environmental politics and promoting sustainable living. Overall, the message is clear: a holistic approach, incorporating indigenous wisdom and ethical stewardship, is crucial for tackling environmental challenges effectively.

Dialogues and counter dialogues: A way towards the principles of ecological citizenship

In one of the instances the head of the Pandora mission, Parker Selfridge shows a cunning behavior of how they could convince the natives. “Look, you’re supposed to be winning the hearts and minds of the natives. Isn’t that the whole point of your little puppet show? If you look like them, if you talk like them, they’ll trust you? We build them a school, teach them English.” This particular dialogue reveals an unconscious secret about how colonizers work. This is absolutely against the concept of ecological citizenship. Yes, we are supposed to be like them, talk like them, and teach them, but at the same time, we need to learn from the natives also. And, if there is a problem to be solved, we need to empathetically jump into their shoes and act instantly. Here Selfridge is very human-centric because he is worried that the communication and conversation with the natives are not going well, but becoming worse. This particular dialogue unfolds how Parker Selfridge is self-centered and he and his team are there just to extract the unobtanium.

Grace, another positive character, is criticizing why the relationship between the natives and the humans is getting worse; the reason is the gun violence, “that tends to happen when you use machine guns on them.” Here Grace reveals her feelings towards the natives and criticizes the killing decision made by Parker. Though Parker ironically says that he doesn’t want to kill the natives, he is doing the opposite. “The idea of citizenship normally refers, inter alia, to a status which arises with a membership of a polity and confers on citizens a set of reciprocal responsibilities and rights” (Hayward, 2006, p. 435).

Jake Sully, the main protagonist of this movie tells the Na’vi people that he was hired to find out all the information from them and act against them. Drive them away from their own lands. Initially, he was on that mission, but later, he fell in love with the forest, with the people, and even with one of the girls (i.e., Neytiri). He is now going to help them and fight against those sky people (the humans) and be one of them. "Dobson suggests that the duties and responsibilities of ecological citizenship arise from the impact individual citizen's activities have on the opportunities of other citizens within or outside the same country" (Wolf et al., 2009, p. 506). Within and outside the same country or within and outside the periphery of one's own place, or one’s own planet, or it may go beyond the planet.

When Tsutey tries to attack the *Avatar* form of Jake by accusing him of making love with his woman and being the reason for inviting sky people (These are humans who are trying to colonize Pandora) to their homeland, Jake Sully replies that he is not the enemy of the clan, rather the enemies are out there. He is there to help them fight against those enemies. A deep feeling towards the native (Na’vi), a citizen instance, is one of them. “[A normative green political theory] embeds a theory of change, the idea that ecological citizenship could be a motivating force for sustainable lifestyles and living standards” (as cited in Wolf et al., 2009, p. 504). “As Hayward notes, ‘ecological citizenship can be construed as a condition of practical

virtue attainable . . . through processes of education and deliberative association and by all, as citizens of the polity in which they find themselves'" (p. 508).

After having a brief tussle with Tsutey, Jake tells the entire clan that he is Omaticaya, and he is one of them and he also says that he has the right to speak. When the concept of rights comes into action, he now speaks like a citizen of Omaticaya. This turns out to be an ecological concern and duty towards another group. Risking one's own life to act for the other. This concept somewhat connects with the concept of Immanuel Levinas's face of the other. "What is needed is the creation of a new 'ecological citizenship', that is, a population of human beings who have internalized knowledge and information about the contemporary situation in such a way as to lead to a new will and to a renewed motivation to act. 'Many things have to change course'" (Howles, 2018, p. 998).

According to Lévinas, the "face of the Other" justifies the priority of ethics over ontology. Before employing reason to create opinions or views about the Other, one must first recognize his "alterity," or otherness, as represented by the "face." One's relationship to the Other is one of infinity insofar as the moral obligation one owes to him cannot ever be fulfilled since, according to Levinas, he is "endlessly transcendent, infinitely alien." "[Dobson's] suggestion for stimulating environmental change is through educational, attitude-changing programmes offered through mainstream education, which create environmental citizens who will then engage in environmental living" (Middlemiss, 2010, p. 156). "Dobson argues for a responsibility orientation, with an emphasis on citizens' responsibility to remain within the limits of a sustainable ecological footprint" (p. 156).

In one moment, Grace shares how nature and the trees are connected with each other. It is a kind of global network, where they can upload and download data and memories. While saying this Parker tries to mock her by accusing her of being insane and smoking some weird things. To this, she replies that the wealth of Pandora's world is not in the ground (she is referring to the unobtanium) rather it is around us. The Na'vi people are fighting to save this, so Grace adds that Parker and his team should understand this. She adds, "If you want to share this world with them, you need to understand them." So, here, understanding the other is very important. When we put ourselves in someone else's shoes then we are focusing on ecological concerns and being ecological citizens. It is not only that, but the scientists in the movie also find out that the trees have a neurological connection with the entire surroundings, which leads us to environmental concerns. This also criticizes how we humans are exploiting nature without understanding its essence of it, whereas these Na'vi people are doing their best to save it. Even if they kill something, they chant their own mantras to free the dead soul. This is an ultimate example of respect towards nature, an ecological concern, and being an ecological citizen. "The construction of a 'design for living' is itself more than a built environment; it is a physical manifestation of a system of values and a record of power. In the name of a shared planetary, a community of fate, new assemblages of authority and practices of governance are emerging into what I call ecological citizenship" (as cited in May, 2008, p. 238).

Jake speaks to the tree of Eywa and requests it to look into the memory of Grace, who died, and see the world where they came from (that is Earth). He mentions that there is no green left on Earth and humans have killed their mother, and they are there in Pandora to do the same. He requests some help from the Eywa (the godmother) to help him to fight against the odds and against the enemies. There and then Neytiri comes and says that the Godmother never takes any sides, but only balances life. This is the epitome of environmental concern, the balancing of life, that's it, nothing more nothing less. Through this, we can drive the conclusion that Jake has accepted their hospitality and wants to become one of them. "The design and building of the

Huangbaiyu project brings to light these tensions of ecological citizenship through the particular chiaroscuro of the doubled development divide between the USA and China, and between urban and rural populations within China. What is at stake in Huangbaiyu is not only of consequence to the persons who have inhabited its spaces, but to all those who are encountering the ethical claims operationalized by ecological citizenship, or are thinking of making such claims on others" (May, 2008, pp. 238–39).

Jake had to pass lots of tests to become one of the Na'vi people and finally, he became one of them. This is an example of the acceptance of outside people into the clan. Though it was not easy for Jake to become one of the members of the clan, he did his best to become one of them and he passed. So, this acceptance is the acceptance by nature, the environment, and ecology.

Upon assessing some dialogues of the movie, it can be claimed that *Avatar* provides profound insights into ecological citizenship, critiquing colonization and violence while emphasizing mutual understanding and respect between cultures. Jake Sully's transformation and the Na'vi's connection with nature underscore the importance of ecological consciousness. Neytiri's belief in life balance highlights harmony in human-nature relationships. Ultimately, the film advocates for unity and responsibility towards nature and its inhabitants, offering a compelling narrative on ecological citizenship principles.

Implications

Wood and Kallio (2019) state that many countries recognize the challenges of environmental planning and sustainability, especially given the mounting evidence indicating rapid rates of climate change, environmental degradation, and dwindling resources. However, there have been less attempts by concerned departments. But a movie like *Avatar* has taken the initiative to protect the Earth. The Pandora inhabitants are closely linked to their environment, and the same has influenced Jake's thoughts. Finally, Jake and Na'vi community succeed in their effort to save their motherland from the clutches of Earthly Colonizers and their Unobtanium extraction mission. Fortunately, our common home Earth is not being invaded by any other beings. If we analyze what we are doing with nature, we will soon realize that we are bringing down an axe to our own legs. We still have time to learn from how environmental degradation is occurring in front of our eyes. We need to find a Jake within us. We need to save everyone's home. "Sci-fi movie Avatar puts forward many issues related to the environment including deforestation, exploitation of nature, ecosophy, deep ecological sense etc. on the backdrop of neo-colonial movements" (C.N., 2018, p. 40). As Edward W Said mentioned in *Orientalism*, it is better to attack the orients before they invade occident is the misconception followed in Eco-Imperial movement over Pandora.

In "An Ecocentric Journey," Tayler (2019) shares his personal reflection on the urgent need of environmental conservation:

> Especially influential were understandings emerging from conservation biology and island biogeography. It did not take long for me to realize that human beings, through the devastating impact of such activities as logging, mining, river damming and road-building, were driving untold species off the planet, and that anthropogenic climate change was looming as possibly the most critical extinction driver yet. I also began to understand where and why some bioregions are exceptionally rich in biodiversity and biomass, and are thus particularly important to conserve, especially if conservation is motivated by ecocentric values. (p. 8)

The *Avatar* movie integrates various thematic aspects, and this paper has discussed the ecological aspect of this movie. Not only that, but the paper also discusses ecological citizenship in accordance with the context, setting as well as characters. The primary goal was to show that the movie depicts the ecological citizenship project, which has resulted in the development of ecological citizens. For this, the paper has descriptively analyzed the notion of ecological citizenship. To reiterate in an open-ended conception, an ecological citizen is more aware of the interdependence between people and the environment and has a higher level of ecological consciousness. An ecological citizen accepts the duties of expanding, active citizenship, including modifying personal habits to advance the common good and joining forces with others to fight for responsible, systemic change. This is in addition to having rights on our planet.

In *Avatar*, even if Jake adopts a form of Na'vi avatar, he thoroughly comprehends the neo-colonial and ecoterror activities of Earthlings over Pandora. He shares his deep ecological concerns with Na'vi community:

> Jake: If Grace is there with you... look in her memories. She can show you the world we come from. There's no green there. They killed their mother, and they're gonna do the same thing here ... More sky people are gonna come. (as cited in C.N., 2018, p. 42)

From the above statement, Jake clearly hints at the apocalyptic changes on his own planet Earth owing to environmental destruction by neo-colonials. It is this injustice that incites Jake to fight for the environmental rights of Pandora and its civilization. This is because Jake cannot ignore the call of Pandora inhabitants. According to Levinas, while responding to the call of the Other, one is rarely worried about his or her life; one puts herself/himself whilst rescuing the other out of danger. To elaborate on Levinas' major points, the face of the other is what calls for a response. It asks one to respond immediately or be responsible. Levinas writes "the Other faces [him] and puts [him] in question and obliges [him]" (p. 207). One cannot remain indifferent to the plea of "the Other." The movie ends with optimistic note as the colonials are returning to Earth, and Jake gets transformed to be a complete Na'vi and thereby becoming part of Pandora forever. If we humans turn into ecological citizens forever like Jake, the universe is bound to be a common beautiful and peaceful home for everyone and everything.

Finally, integrating *Avatar* into educational curricula presents a promising avenue for enriching environmental literacy among students, thereby cultivating a more profound comprehension of ecological issues and igniting proactive involvement in environmental conservation efforts. By harnessing the film's powerful themes of interconnectedness and ecological stewardship, educators have the opportunity to imbue students with essential values of environmental responsibility and citizenship. Through critical analysis and discussion of the movie's narrative, characters, and dialogues, students can explore complex ecological concepts such as biodiversity, ecosystem dynamics, and the intrinsic value of nature. Several studies provide evidence that children and young people maintain a strong interest in and concern for environmental issues. Research conducted in Australia (Harris and Wyn, 2010) and across the OECD (Schulz et al., 2010) indicates that young individuals view climate change and environmental degradation as among the most pressing challenges of their time. Furthermore, there is international evidence suggesting that young people are increasingly engaging in community-based initiatives and participating in online campaigns, particularly related to environmental issues and ethical consumption (Sherrod et al., 2010). Moreover, Luzon-Aguado (2022) "the youngest are currently leading the way in the definition of human-nature relationships (p. 259). Moreover, by contextualizing the film within real-world environmental challenges, educators can empower students to recognize the relevance of these issues to their

own lives and communities. By engaging with *Avatar* in educational settings, students not only gain knowledge but also develop the empathy, critical thinking skills, and sense of agency necessary to become informed and active stewards of the environment.

Conclusion

This study of *Avatar* unveils a rich tapestry of themes centered around ecological citizenship and its implications. The movie serves as a profound exploration of humanity's relationship with nature, critiquing colonialism, violence, and environmental destruction while advocating for mutual understanding, respect, and responsibility towards the environment. Through the character of Jake Sully, viewers witness a transformation emblematic of ecological consciousness, as he embraces the Na'vi way of life and fights against Earthly colonizers to protect Pandora. Neytiri's belief in life balance underscores the importance of harmony in human-nature relationships, while Grace's reverence for nature stresses the interconnectedness and intrinsic value of all life forms. The dialogues within the movie provide insightful commentary on the principles of ecological citizenship, emphasizing the need for empathy, understanding, and collective action in safeguarding our green planet. As the narrative unfolds, it becomes evident that ecological citizenship transcends mere environmental activism; it entails a fundamental shift in perspective towards recognizing the inherent rights and responsibilities we hold towards the environment and its inhabitants. Ultimately, *Avatar* serves as a call to action, urging viewers to adopt the mindset of ecological citizens and work towards building a sustainable and harmonious future for all living and non-living entities on Earth.

Avatar stands as a cinematic masterpiece that goes beyond mere entertainment and the embellishment of technology, delving into profound ecological themes and the concept of ecological citizenship. Through the transformative journey of protagonist Jake Sully and the Na'vi people, the film sparks reflections on the interconnectedness of humanity and nature. The portrayal of ecological citizens challenging exploitative forces resonates with contemporary discussions on environmental responsibility. The movie serves as a powerful visual metaphor, urging viewers to transcend conventional loyalties and embrace the idea of ecological citizenship. As research trends in film studies explore environmental narratives, *Avatar* remains a critical subject for investigation, bridging gaps in understanding the film's impact on shaping ecological attitudes. There is a need for producing such movies to raise awareness among general public.

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